Department of Justice Canada | Ministère de la Justice Canada

Canada

Speaking Notes for
THE HONOURABLE ROB NICHOLSON, P.C., Q.C.,
M.P. for Niagara Falls
Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada
to the
Rotary Club of Edmonton

Edmonton, Alberta
October 4, 2007

Check against delivery

Introduction

Thank you, [MC], for your kind introduction. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

I am always honoured to meet with men and women who are keen to contribute their time and effort to making our country a better place for their communities – and for all Canadians.

Edmonton is a beautiful, vibrant city and it is always a pleasure for me to visit here.

I commend your efforts, as members of Rotary, to help make this city stronger and healthier, and a better place in which to live.

As Canada's Minister of Justice, I particularly appreciate the projects you undertake and support that contribute to safer streets and healthier communities.

On behalf of all Canadians, I want to say thank you for being so dedicated and generous.

I am sure that all of us here would agree that safe streets and low crime rates are good for any city.

They are the qualities that make people want to move there, and raise their families there.

In fact, safe streets and secure communities have been the hallmark of Canadian society over the past several decades.

And Canada as a whole is a law-abiding country with one of the most respected justice systems in the world.

But in recent years, this hard-won reputation has been put to the test by rising rates of crime, particularly involving guns, gangs and drug activity.

Edmonton, sadly, is no exception. The rise in violent crimes here is especially shocking.

Our Government was elected to build a strong, safer, better Canada – one in which Canadians feel confident that they will be able to live and raise their families in safety and security.

Canadians deserve no less.

Our Justice Agenda – Tough and Balanced

We remain committed to that goal, and we will continue pursuing it when Parliament resumes later this month. And a majority of Canadians seem to agree with us.

Just last week, my department released its annual National Justice Survey. And do you know what it found?

It found that two-thirds of Canadians say they support this Government's approach to criminal justice. They support us in areas such as

- increasing police presence;
- strengthening sentencing laws; and
- trying to prevent youth drug and gang involvement.

In the same survey, Canadians indicated that the three most important goals of sentencing should be to

- repair the harm caused by the crime;
- make the offender take responsibility for his or her actions – that is, be accountable; and
- rehabilitate the offender in order to prevent him or her from committing another offence.

Well, let me tell you, ladies and gentlemen, this is exactly what this Government tried to do in the last Parliament.

We brought forward legislation which would have

- raised the age of consent from 14 to 16 years to protect youth from adult sexual predators;
- imposed mandatory jail time on those convicted of serious offences involving guns;
- put the onus on those who commit crimes with a gun to prove why they should be granted bail and be free to roam the streets pending their trial; and
- ensured that high-risk and dangerous offenders face tougher consequences when they are sentenced, and are kept better track of when they are released into the community.

These bills were getting tough on crime and criminals. They would have held criminals to account with punishments that match the severity of their crime.

But as you know, our legislative agenda was met with constant road blocks and delays, in the House of Commons and in the Senate.

But rest assured that this Government remains committed to tackling crime.

Because protecting society is a priority for this Government, not an afterthought.

Our determination to keep Canadians safe is unwavering.

Identity Theft

I was pleased to be in Montréal with my colleague Jean-Pierre Blackburn to announce that our

Government will protect Canadians from identity theft by introducing changes to the Criminal Code that will give police the tools they need to stop this activity before the damage is done.

As it stands now, it is an offence in the Criminal Code, when an individual uses someone else's identity to commit a crime, such as identity fraud, personation and forgery.

But it is currently not a crime to collect, possess or traffic in identity information. By introducing this legislation, we want to change this.

The reality is that identity theft has been recognized as one of the fastest growing problems in North America.

It easily crosses borders and it's hard to track.

It is estimated that identity theft may cost Canadian consumers, banks and credit card firms, stores and other businesses more than $2 billion annually.

It has become a highly lucrative activity for organized criminal organizations, and modern technology has facilitated that growth by making identity theft easier than ever to collect, store and transmit personal data.

Youth Crime

Before I wrap up my speech, there is one more issue I would like to address today, which I know is on the minds of many people here in Edmonton: youth crime.

Too often, youth can make bad decisions that draw them into a lifestyle marked by drugs and violence.

These can lead to crimes that are so heinous that they shock entire communities out of their complacency.

This is why, our Government intends to improve the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*, as part of our action to strengthen the criminal justice system as a whole.

Drugs

Our Government takes this issue seriously, because of the damage and pain drugs cause families – and the lives that are ruined.

This is why, in our last budget, we committed nearly $64 million above existing funding for the next two years toward a National Anti-Drug Strategy.

This strategy has three goals:

- to prevent drug use;
- to treat drug dependency; and
- to tackle drug production and distribution.

Together, these three action plans form a focused and balanced approach to reducing the supply of, and demand for illicit drugs, as well as addressing the crime associated with them.

Conclusion

All of these measures represent a clear commitment on the part of our Government to deal directly and effectively with the problem of criminal violence.

Our Government's legislation agenda for justice aims to protect our streets and communities and build a stronger, safer, better Canada.

But as we continue to pursue this agenda, we will need the support and action of Canadians and community groups like the Rotary Club of Edmonton.

And I fully expect that members will get involved quickly and continue your proud history of civic achievement.

On behalf of the Government of Canada, and of all Canadians, I want to thank the members of the Rotary Club of Edmonton for their hard work.

Your efforts help make Canada stronger, safer and better.

Thank you.

- 30 -

Date Modified: **2008-04-14**